

Musicians of Change

---

# Musical creativity

---

RACHEL WATSON, 17/1/26

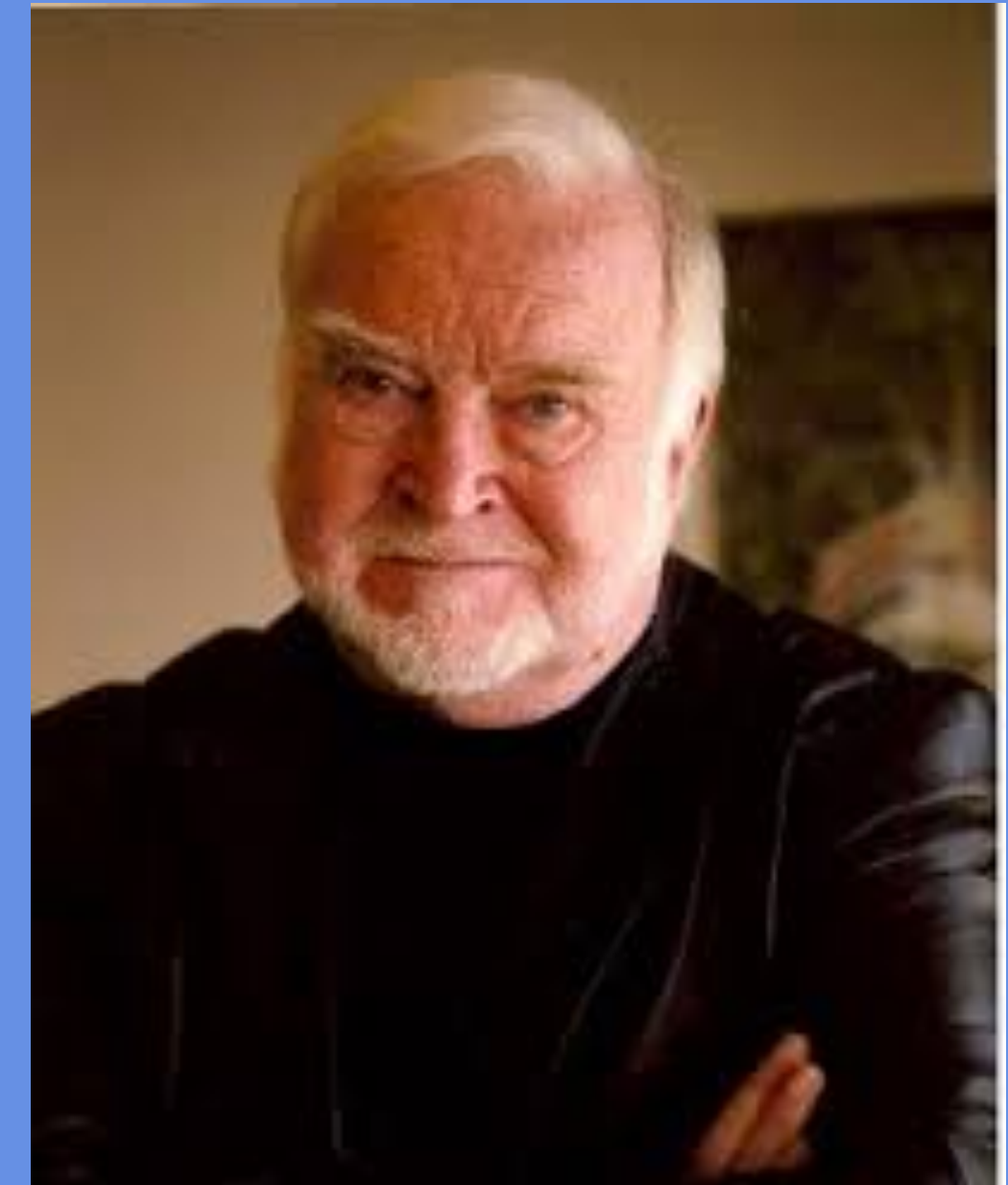
---

# CREATIVITY

- Definitions
- Theories and models of musical creativity
- Examples
- Reflection and application

# What is creativity?

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1934-2021)
  - Defines creativity as ‘something genuinely new that is valued enough to be added to the culture’ (*Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, p. 25)
  - ‘Systems’ model of creativity:
    - ‘Domain’: the area (general or specific) in which the activity takes place e.g. music or a particular genre
    - ‘Field’: the ‘gatekeepers’, e.g. teachers/editors/critics
    - ‘Person’: one who creates something that the field accepts and is incorporated into the domain
      - Focus is on the quality/significance of the product rather than process
      - ‘Big-C’ creativity





---

# Four C Model

Kaufmann and Beghetto, 'Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity', *Review of General Psychology* 2009, vol. 13, No. 1, 1-12.

- **Big C:** Eminent creativity, works of 'creative genius'
- **Little c:** 'Everyday' creativity
- **Mini c:** 'Personal' creativity. 'The novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experiences, actions, and events' (p. 3).
- **Pro-c:** Professional creators who have not reached 'eminent' status

---

# Non-hierarchical Models

Sciaroni, 'Mapping the Mountain: An Open Model of Creativity for String Education', *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, vol. 27, No. 1, Spring 2019, 4-20.

- Criticises hierarchical models of creativity: by putting different types into a binary/continuum certain modes of creativity are valued over others
- Musical culture: focus on 'great Composers' or hierarchy of composer, performer, listener
  - For more, see Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*
- Instead, proposes model of a mapped landscape: mountains and foothills
  - Creative paths can be 'traced': following existing routes of how *should* create (e.g. learning to improvise through studying famous examples)
  - Map: routes are continually open to reimagination

---

# Discussion (10 min)

- What do you consider by ‘musical creativity’?
- What sort of activities might promote/demonstrate musical creativity?
- What conditions are needed for creativity to be present? What knowledge/experience (if any) is needed?
- Is it possible to be creative while playing someone else’s music?



---

# Musical Creativity

Finney, 'Creativity, Culture, and the Practice of Music Education', *Debates in Music Teaching*, 2012.

- Musical creativity is often thought of in terms of composing/improvising
- John Paynter (writing in the 1960s): 'all musical activity – listening, composing and performing – is essentially creative.'
- Finney on Paynter: 'Music was an art, and **artistic behaviour** fundamentally involved a process of making, where decisions were taken, judgements made, responding to what was coincidental and working towards a fresh model of musical reality. While the composition of music took a central position in this, engaging with music in whatever way called for its making and remaking in the imagination.' (p. 35)

---

# Praxial Model

Elliott (ed.), *Praxial Music Education: Reflections and Dialogues*

- From the word ‘praxis’: action that is embedded in/responsive to a particular context or effort
- Music as a human activity: purposeful, contextual and socially-embedded
- Creativity in all aspects of music education – overlaps and extends process of developing musicianship
- Creativity within knowledge of specific genres and part of all aspects of music education



---

“So, a basic tenet of the praxial approach to musical creativity is that “creativity” is not something we restrict to teaching composing and improvising. Everything we do as music teachers should integrate the development of students’ musical understanding and students’ creative know-how. For example, if we are teaching our students to sing a simple song by Schubert, or Ella Fitzgerald, then we should simultaneously teach them to sing expressively in relation to the way music is sung in these styles and, also, develop their “creative mindsets” by inviting them to make suggestions (reflect) about and experiment with different interpretations of these songs, answer questions and give reasons for their choices, and so forth. In these ways, students learn that music making is not a simple matter of sound-producing; rather, musical music making involves reflecting on, generating, and selecting musical options toward creative outcomes.”

**Elliott, <https://www.davidelliottmusic.com/praxial-music-education/musical-creativity/>**

---

---

# Alternative Models

- Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education* (Chapter 4, 'The Creating Dimension of Musical Experience'), 137-8.
  - However music is created, 'the music itself makes demands of the one creating' – 'genuineness' requires an attitude of 'honouring the music'
  - Musical competence is required to create
  - Musical creativity as search for 'musical meaning'
  - Inner lives of individuals are expanded by creative acts
  - Musical creation as a way to 'know' and be engaged in musical meanings
  - Multifaceted and can be applied to music of all cultures

---

“I want to argue that issues of *what* is creativity are better, more validly framed as issues of *when* is creativity. This shifts the focus from establishing absolute criteria to describing the ways people act when *being* creative. I will argue that anyone *being* creative is, at that time, creative.”

Reimer, 143.

---



---

# Alternative Models

- Sciaroni (p. 13)
  - Two conditions for musical creativity
    - **Awareness**
    - **Imagination**

---

# Flow States

Lori Custodero, 'Observable Indicators of Flow Experience', *Music Education Research*, 2005.

- Creativity/individual engagement with music linked to experiences of 'flow'
- **Challenge Seeking Indicators:** observed in independent behaviour
  - **Self-assignment:** self-initiated and purposeful activity, suggesting a concern for skill acquisition and mastery
  - **Self-correction:** error adjustment in response to immediate feedback and clear goals
  - **Gesture:** deliberate control and focus of movement as a result of intense concentration
- **Challenge Monitoring Indicators:** responses to information/material presented by someone else
  - **Anticipation:** attempts to guess/demonstrate that which is to follow as a result of immersion in an activity and merging of action/awareness
  - **Expansion:** transforming material to become more challenging
  - **Extension:** continuing to engage in the material beyond the end of the activity

---

# An Alternative to ‘Getting it Right’

Anna Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, 2022.

- ‘Correctional pedagogy’ of classical music teaching i.e. a focus on what students are getting wrong
- Hierarchy built in at all levels: composer over performer, teacher over student
- ‘Master-apprentice’ style teaching where students are told what to do
- Creativity emphasises treating students as **musicians now** rather than only building skills for the future
- Links to work on creativity by Sue Young
  - Questioning: What would it sound like if...? What would happen if you tried...? Focus on experiments and musical choices



---

# Case Study 1

1 to 1 lesson in an independent primary school

Sarah is a cellist I have been teaching for three years. She is meant to be taking her grade 2 exam in four weeks. She has been doing little practice, and is playing with a restricted sound and is often out of tune. We sing the intervals in her piece, and I show her how to match the pitch of her 4th finger to the open string below. I also repeatedly tell her to put her bow closer to the bridge and play with more weight going through her arm. We go through the piece and look at the dynamics, and we work on quiet and loud sounds. We practise the place where she is playing out of tune, and clap a rhythm that she is struggling with. It feels like we have done the same work in every lesson, and we are both frustrated.

*What could I do differently in the next lesson to make this a creative and musical experience for Sarah?*

---

# Case Study 2

## Group violin lesson in state primary school

A group of ten children in year 6 have been learning the violin since year 1. Although their teacher reports that in previous years there were high levels of parental engagement and practice, this has become much more difficult particularly following Covid. One child, Emma, had not been engaged with the repertoire she had been asked to learn but came to a lesson with a tune she had composed at home. With her teacher's help, she developed this into a piece which she then taught to the rest of her group. This then led to other children also composing their own pieces. In the lesson observed, the group was enthusiastically rehearsing a piece by Emma with multiple parts which included advanced string crossing and shifting. Her picture has also been placed on a world map of composers that the group have been listening to and playing.

*How does this approach disrupt traditional hierarchies in music teaching? How has composition been used (or could be used) to also develop other musical skills?*

---

# Case Study 3

## Music project in an ARP (Additionally Resourced Provision) context

Jay is ten, and in a class for children with significant learning needs within a mainstream school. He has previously had access to a musicianship class, but found it difficult to engage. A small group of musicians is now working with his class for a year. The lead musician prioritises making the group feel safe with established and predictable routines while consistently offering choices. For example, each child chooses their own action or rhythm in the 'Hello' song before a turn-taking activity using a pair of Odd Balls (balls which can be programmed to produce different sounds when thrown, rolled, tapped together etc). The children then choose an instrument to play along to a familiar song. Jay has chosen the keyboard, and continues to play after the song has finished. Rather than ask him to stop, the lead musician asks if he would like to share his motif with the group. The following week at this point in the lesson, several children excitedly ask to share rhythms and patterns, leading to an extended group improvisation.

*What conditions needed to be in place for Jay and his class to feel confident to explore their creativity? What might the lead musician do next to develop this project?*



---

# Discussion and Reflection

- Choose one or more of the case studies, and use the questions as a starting point for discussion
- Choose a lesson that you have observed, and think either about how an element of musical creativity was explored or how a creative approach could have been used more fully.

---

# Group Task

- Think of an area of your teaching that you would not automatically think of as 'creative'. How might prioritising creativity change the way that you teach this area? What might be the advantages and/or the challenges of this approach?

---

# Feedback and Questions

[rachel.watson@musicmasters.org.uk](mailto:rachel.watson@musicmasters.org.uk)



---

# Further Reading

Beach, N. (2011). 'Creativity and Instrumental Skills Development', in Beach, Evans and Spruce (ed) *Making Music in the Primary School: Whole Class Instrumental and Vocal Teaching*

Bull, A. (2022). *Class, Control and Classical Music*

Burnard, P. (2012). *Musical Creativities in Real World Practice*

Burnard, P. & R. Murphy (2017). *Teaching Music Creatively*

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*

Custodero, L. (2005). 'Observable Indicators of Flow Experience', *Music Education Research*

Elliott, D. (2009). *Praxial Music Education: Reflections and Dialogues*

Elliott, D. & M. Silverman (2015). *Music Matters: A Philosophy of Music Education*

Finney, J. (2012). 'Creativity, Culture, and the Practice of Music Education', *Debates in Music Teaching*.

Kaufmann and Beghetto (2019). 'Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity', *Review of General Psychology*, vol. 13, No. 1, 1-12.

Paynter, J. (1970). *Sound and Silence: Classroom Projects in Creative Music*

Paynter, J. (1982). *Music in the Secondary School Curriculum*

Sciaroni, R. (2019). 'Mapping the Mountain: An Open Model of Creativity for String Education', *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, vol. 27, No. 1, 4-20.

Reimer, B. (2022). *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision* (3rd edition)